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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; ARGENTINE FOREIGN POLICY; 11/21/07

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's most important international stories are related to President-elect Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's trip to Brazil and a change of priorities in Argentina's foreign policy.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "(Argentina's) foreign policy has already started"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" (11/21) front-pages an opinion piece by prestigious political analyst Joaquin Morales Sola, who opines "The (Argentine) President-elect has already made a U-turn on foreign policy issues.

"It is increasingly clear that Argentina's main ally in the region is Brazil and that Chile comes next. The news is that Hugo Chavez does not appear among Argentina's foreign policy priorities although Cristina Kirchner does not often criticize him or let other leaders do it.

"Truly enough, Chavez' attitudes have distanced him from the President elect rather than Cristina's foreign policy convictions.

"... Chavez's fourth visit to Iran in just two years is another point of disagreement between the Venezuelan leader and Cristina... The President-elect has a long-standing commitment to clarifying the fierce attack on AMIA...

"... Not long ago, an influential foreigner told Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez that Argentina should put its ties to the US on a safe track... The President-elect's decision to appoint an entrusted person as US Ambassador could indicate that she has decided to handle ties to Washington personally. During recent years Chavez has been a permanent obstacle to the US-Argentine bilateral relationship. Distancing from Chavez or getting closer to him implies two different ways of relating to the world."

- "The Buenos Aires-Brasilia axis"

Walter Goobar, international columnist of business-financial "BAE," writes (11/21) "In her short five-hour visit to Brazil, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's crystal-clear words and gestures confirmed that she will give the Buenos Aires-Brasilia axis top priority. Ever since the President-elect confirmed her visit to Brazil, the Brazilian media have speculated very much with Buenos Aires' 'change of focus, more inclined to Brasilia rather than Caracas,' although Brazilians hesitated with the appointment of Economy Minister Martin Lousteau... Lousteau could impose a critical view of Mercosur's impact.

"Lousteau criticizes the asymmetries with Brazil and believes that

Mercosur did not contribute to Argentina's industrialization.

"... The number of ongoing projects (between Argentina and Brazil), which are supposed to be short- or mid-term, is another piece of evidence of the so-called strategic partnership between the two countries.

"... There are cooperation projects on defense and energy, and also the possibility to stop using the dollar as a reference currency in financial exchanges within the bloc...

"There is also the possibility that Embraer (Empresa Brasileira de Aeronautica) could build cargo airplanes for the Argentine Air Force...

"... The international scenario is where Cristina distances herself from her husband. The President-elect has already set priorities - the Southern Cone. She has been to Chile, Brazil and she will go to Uruguay, according to the evolution of the Botnia crisis.

"On foreign policy issues, the order of any number of factors does matter. This is why for the time being Lula comes before Hugo Chavez. In this way, the priorities established by (Cristina's) husband have changed.

"This change of priorities was defined when Brazil announced its withdrawal from Gasoducto del Sur."

- "Nearer Lula, further from Chavez?"

Eduardo van der Kooy, political columnist for leading "Clarín," opines (11/21) "... Cristina Fernandez's trip to Brasilia could imply a smooth turn in the orientation established by the Nestor Kirchner administration. The President-elect believes that current and also future conditions could justify the reiteration of strong winks in Argentina's alliance with Lula da Silva, Argentina's main strategic partner.

"Will this mean a distancing from Hugo Chavez? Cristina will not make any gesture that could be interpreted as distancing herself from Venezuela and she will also honor her commitments to Venezuela. One example - the senator has asked Lula to make an effort to approve Venezuela's entry into Mercosur... Caracas appreciated her gesture...

"The Kirchnerist government has always had in mind that Venezuela provided financial aid for our country at difficult moments. As a matter of fact, Argentina will again have to honor financial commitments next year for about seven billion dollars. Perhaps Caracas will again have to purchase more debt bonds. However, Cristina may want to have her Paris Club deal unblocked by then. If this happens, the brand-new government could have some alternative sources of funding.

"Beyond those considerations, the Argentine-Venezuelan bilateral ties have cooled down. The incident between Chavez and King Juan Carlos from Spain during the Ibero-American summit contributed to it...

"Regarding Chavez's constitutional amendment project, Kirchner and Cristina have questioned it. They are also mistrustful over the progress made in Venezuela's ties to Iran...

"... Cristina's trip was the first she made abroad as President-elect... It is true that she was previously in Chile, but she did that to attend the Ibero-American Summit. Her choice did not seem by chance but rather to establish a priority in regional politics in an attempt to preserve the fragile balance exhibited so far."

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